Ritushree Sengupta

Supervisor: Professor Debarati Bandyopadhyay

Title: Human and Nonhuman Existence: Exploring Literary Ecology in Select Works of Victorian Fiction

Registration Number:VB-1863 of 2015-16

Date of Registration: 31.8.2015

Synopsis

Victorian fiction has been critically analysed in various ways. However, there are works of fiction which are yet to be explored in terms of their ecological content. Margaret Gatty's *Parables from Nature* (1855), Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1862-63), Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty: The Autobiography of a Horse* (1877) and Kipling's *The Jungle Books* (1894 and 1895) and *Just So Stories* (1902) appear to have the potential to undergo an ecocritical analysis. In the proposed research work an attempt will be made to probe into the texts from an ecological approach, with special reference to Joseph Meeker's theory of literary ecology.

The Water Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land- Baby (1862-63), is considered to be a popular Victorian text which has been examined from various critical angles. For instance Jessica Straley in her essay "Of Beasts and Boys: Kingsley, Spencer and the Theory of Recapitulation" marks the text as a satire on morphology and its practitioners. She also states that Kingsley was a supporter of the theory of evolution and he wanted to reconcile it with natural theology that interpreted the beauty and order of the physical world as a demonstration of divine design. Brendan Rapple in his essay "Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*: The Spiritual and Physical Cleansing Properties of Water" interlinks various motifs which are associated with water such as social class, virtue, physical as well as psychological cleanliness and of course moral purification. In the essay "Marvelous Plasticity and the Fortunes of Species in the *Water Babies*", Anna Neill examines Kingsley's critique of evolution in the context of social and biological development. Ravenna Helson wrote on "The Psychological Origins of Fantasy for Children in Mid-Victorian England" to discuss contemporary conflicts that left their imprint even on fairy tales. Though the *Water Babies* has a story line involving human and nonhuman entities it has not been explored ecocritically.

Black Beauty has been subjected to critical studies of animal oppression. Harriet Ritvo in her book *Animal Estate* has noted the frequent interchanges of the terms used for domestic servants and domestic animals in the nineteenth century. Robert Dingley in "A Horse of a Different Color: Black Beauty and the Pressure of Indebtedness" observes Sewell's *Black Beauty* as a text which emphasizes the portrayal of Victorian perception of the indebtedness involved in the master-servant relation. *Black Beauty* has also been categorized under the umbrella term of 'pony-stories' which is a part of literature about animals. In "Riders, Readers ,Romance: A Short History of the Pony Story", Jenny Kendrick points out that *Black Beauty* is not just a crusade against maltreatment of animals but it also acknowledges the social forces that compel humans into such behaviour. However, the classic observation on the concept of talking animals in

respect of this text has been Tess Cosslett's *Talking Animals in British Children's Fiction, 1786-1914* where tracing the origins of animal stories, she investigates its distinct nineteenth century form. She had also considered Gatty's *Parables from Nature* from this perspective as Gatty's text involves not just talking domestic animals as we see in Sewell, but initiates the representation of communicating animals at large.

During the Victorian period, Margaret Gatty was known for her scientific pursuits and literary contributions. Alan Rauch in"Parables and Parodies: Margaret Gatty's Audiences in *Parables from Nature*" asserted that there has been a misreading of Gatty in terms of her perceived status merely as a quaint Victorian botanizer and the mother of the extremely popular children's fiction writer Juliana Horatia Ewing. Rauch also finds that *Parables from Nature* was meant for a broader audience which included not only the children but also the adults who would read out the stories to them. Stephen E. Hunt in 'Free, Bold, Joyous': The Love of Sea-Weed in Margaret Gatty and other Mid-Victorian Writers" insists that Gatty reflects on the world of nature like other contemporary nature writers such as Elizabeth Anne Allom (*The Sea-weed Collector*, 1841), Isabella Gifford (*The Marine Botanist*, 1848) or Philip Henry Gosse. Gatty's *Parables* presented talking plants and animals but they have not been seen as fanciful, rather critics like Mary Ellen Bellanca in "'Recollecting Nature': George Eliot's 'Ilfracombe Journal' and Victorian Women's Natural History Writing" view her work as a strong example of Victorian nature writing. Despite the presence of strong ecological components, Gatty's *Parables* has not been approached ecocritically except by Tess Cosslett.

Considering the texts of Kipling, Noel Annan in "Kipling's Place in the History of Ideas", found Kipling symbolizing a part of British political and social history about which his countrymen have an uneasy conscience. Kipling is mostly viewed as an imperialist writer but there are critics who have tried to analyse a different side of him considering his writings for children. Dieter Petzold in "Fantasy out of Myth and Fable: Animal Stories in Rudyard Kipling and Richard Adams" argued that Kipling's *Just So Stories* and *Jungle Books* have deep roots in myths and folklore. Charles Allen's biographical study "Kipling Sahib – India and the making of Rudyard Kipling" articulates that Kipling's Bombay childhood left a deep imprint on his psyche because the servants who attended him used to cater to his fancy with Indian tales. Petzold also analysed the humanization and individualization of animals in Kipling's *Jungle Books* in terms of the desire for the reconciliation of the primitive natural laws and 'The Laws' (an elaborate code of civilized behaviour) of human world. Jane Hotchkiss in "The Jungle of Eden: Kipling, Wolf Boys, and the Colonial Imagination" interpreted the protagonist of *Jungle Books*, Mowgli as an ideal representation of the wild child capable of forming a bond between his human self and non-human environment. John McBratney in "Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space in Kipling's Jungle Books" dealt with Mowgli's dual identity and manifestations of colonial space and subject. Carole Scott in "Kipling's Combat Zones: Training Grounds in the Mowgli Stories, *Captains Courageous* and *Stalky & Co."* found a reflection of Kipling's own obsession for law and order in *Jungle Books*. Again, it is observed that these are not always ecocritical studies of Kipling's works.

Despite dissimilarities in content and style, these texts appear to have the potential for ecocritical analysis. These texts have been explored from socio-cultural and imperial angles, but not ecological, therefore there is substantial scope for ecocritical research in the proposed thesis. Ecocriticism assesses how humans are related to and affect their ecology and environment as

represented in literature. Garrard in *Ecocriticism* described the different branches of ecocriticism such as environmentalism, deep ecology, ecofeminism and social ecology. In the proposed research ecocriticism is the overarching critical tool. In particular, however, Joseph Meeker's idea of literary ecology as discussed in *The Comedy of Survival* will be focused on. Meeker's idea of literary ecology suggests that creation of literature is a unique human function which assists in comprehending ecological relations and the effect that it has on the welfare and survival of humanity and ecology. According to Meeker certain human activities are favourable for survival while some of them are destructive at the individual as well as collective levels. To Meeker, acts of destruction are tragic and acts and instincts leading to survival are comic. He stated that animals prioritise survival while humans often prove destructive and analysed a number of literary texts from the perspective of literary ecology.In the light of Meeker's idea of literary ecology, in the proposed research work there will be an attempt to analyse selected Victorian works of fiction to explore their tragic or comic ecological potential.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

Garrad, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. Taylor and Francis e-Library: Routledge, 2004. Web.

Gatty, Margaret.*Parables from Nature*.Chapel Hill: Yesterday's Classics, 2006. Digital Library Project.Web. 24 April 2015.

Kingsley, Charles. *Water Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land- Baby.*Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey Ltd., 2000. Nineteenth Century Fiction Full- Text Database.Web. 24 April 2015.

Kipling, Rudyard. *The Jungle Books.*London: Penguin, 1994.Print.

Kipling, Rudyard. *Just So Stories*.London: Puffin Books,2008.Print.

Meeker, Joseph.W.*The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic*. Arizona: U of Arizona P, 1997. Print

Sewell, Anna. *Black Beauty:The Autobiography of a Horse*.Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey Ltd., 2000. Nineteenth Century Fiction Full- Text Database.Web. 24 April 2015.

Secondary Sources:

Allen, Charles. *Kipling Sahib: India and the Making of Rudyard Kipling*. New York: Pegasus Books,2010. Print

Annan, Noel.“Kipling’s Place in the History of Ideas”.*Victorian Studies* 3 (June 1960) 323-348.JSTOR Web. 15 May 2015.

Bellanca, Mary Ellen. “ George Eliot’s “ Ilfracombe Journal” and Victorian Women’s Natural History Writing”. *Modern Language Studies* 27 (Autumn-Winter 1997):19-36. JSTOR.Web. 15 May 2015.

Cosslett, Tess. ‘“Animals Under Man?’: Margaret Gatty’s*Parables from Nature*’’, *Women’sWriting* 10.1(2003):137-52.Print.

Cosslett, Tess. *Talking Animals in British Children’s Fiction, 1786-1914*.Aldershot,Hampshire: *Ashgate*,2006. Print.

Dingley, Robert.“A Horse of a Different Color: “Black Beauty” and the Pressures of Indebtedness” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 25(1997):241-251. JSTOR.Web. 15 May 2015.

Helson, Ravenna. “The Psychological Origins of Fantasy for Children in Mid- Victorian England”. *Children’s Literature* 3(1974):66-76 PROJECT MUSE. Web.15 May 2015.

Hotchkiss, Jane “The Jungle of Eden: Kipling, Wolf Boys and the Colonial Imagination” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 29 (2001):435-449. JSTOR. Web 15 May 2015.

Hunt, Stephen E. “ 'Free, Bold, Joyous': The Love of Seaweed in Margaret Gatty and Other Mid-Victorian Writers”. *Environment and History*11(February 2005):5-34.JSTOR.Web.15 May 2015.

Kendrick, Jenny.“Riders, Readers, Romance: A Short History of the Pony Story”. *Jenesse:YoungPeople, Texts, Culture* 1(Winter 2009):183-202.PROJECT MUSE.Web.15 May 2015.

Lundin, Anne. Rev. of *Dark Horse: A Life of Anna Sewells*. The Lion and the Unicorn April 2005:280. Web.

McBratney, John. “Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space in Kipling’s “Jungle Book”” *VictorianStudies* 35 (Spring 1992):227-293.JSTOR.Web.15 May 2015.

Neill, Anna. “Marvelous Plasticity and the Fortunes of Species in The Water Babies”. *Philosophy and Literature* 38 (October 2014):162-177.PROJECT MUSE.Web. 15 May 2015.

Petzold, Dieter. “Fantasy out of Myth and Fable: Animal Stories in Rudyard Kipling and Richard Adams” *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 12 (Spring 1987):15-19. PROJECT MUSE. Web.15 May 2015.

Rapple, Brendan“Charles Kingsley’s Water Babies: The Spiritual and Physical Cleansing Properties of Water”*Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* (1989):42-46. PROJECT MUSE. Web.15 May 2015.

Rauch, Allan.‘‘Parables and Parodies: Margaret Gatty’s Audiences in the Parables from Nature”. *Children’s Literature* 25(1997):137-152. PROJECT MUSE. Web. 15 May 2015.

Ritvo, Harriet. *The Animal Estate*.Harvard: Harvard UP,1987. Print.

Scott, Carole. “Kipling’s Combat Zones: Training Grounds in the Mowgli Stories, Captains Courageous, and Stalky &co” *Children’s Literature* 20 (1992):1-14. PROJECT MUSE. Web. 15 May 2015.

Seelye,John D. Introduction. *Captains Courageous* by Rudyard Kipling. London: Penguin,2005. Vii-Xiv.Web.

Straley, Jessica.“Of Beasts and Boys: Kingsley, Spencer and the Theory of Recapitulation” *Victorian Studies* 19 (Summer 2007):583-609. JSTOR.Web. 15 May 2015.

Tomkins, J.M.S. *The Art of Rudyard Kipling*. London: Methuen & Co., 1959. Print.